

Senate Bill 364

School Meals for All

Senator Nancy Skinner, D-Berkeley

THIS BILL

In California, every child has the right to a free education, regardless of their income and what they are able to pay. Yet, while we know that good nutrition supports classroom learning, our schools are required to implement out-of-date and bureaucratic applications to determine financial need before serving a child a meal. This not only undermines California's ability to prevent hunger, experienced by 1 in every 5 children in our state, but also undermines our ability to focus on child learning and development in the school settings.

SB 364 makes school meals available to every public school student without red-tape or paperwork. This bill will cut school administrative costs, improve learning, help families and support California farmers and food producers.

ISSUE

Before the pandemic, to receive a free meal at a California public school, a student would have to:

- Attend a school where more than 40% of students qualify for free meals.
- Live in a household with CalFresh or Medi-Cal recipients.
- Apply for a free meal, verifying that their family income is at or below 130% of the Federal poverty level (FPL).

The only exception to this rule is in the serving of Afterschool Suppers, which were enacted with the passage of AB 626 (Skinner, 2013), which are offered free to all students participating in afterschool programs, regardless of income and without a needs tested application.

During the pandemic, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has taken steps to allow schools to provide a free meal or multiple meals at a school site to any student that needs food. However, the federal waivers that allow for the "Universal Free Meal" program is set to expire at the end of this summer, taking away a critical nutritional resource from children and families as they struggle with the long-term economic impacts of the COVID-19 recession.

Additionally, the California Department of Education and the California Department of Social Services implemented the federal Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) program, which allowed the state to provide EBT food benefits equal to the value of lost school meals to nearly 4 million children that qualify for free and reduced meals. Despite the success of this program, there is no plan for P-EBT to continue post-pandemic.

While essential anti-hunger programs are set to sunset, California remains one of the states suffering from the most food-insecurity, despite being one of the most abundant producers of food. Shortchanging our School Meal Programs means that they neither prevent hunger among the nearly 745,000 children who are low-income in California, nor do they support our food system economy or job creation in the school meal programs.

SOLUTION

SB 364 seeks to ensure free meals for all school children, while maximizing available federal funds to support California's food economy and combat child hunger by:

- Ensuring every public school student is served free meals without requiring their family to apply.
- Increasing student access to California-grown and freshly prepared food.
- Establishing the Better Out of School Time (BOOST) Nutrition Program, modeled on the P-EBT program, to prevent child hunger during regularly scheduled school breaks and emergency school campus closures.
- Increasing child privacy and safety net program connection for school meal applications using an online application, until meal applications are permanently phased out.

SUPPORT

Acterra: Action for a Healthy Planet
Agricultural Institute of Marin
Alameda County Community Food Bank
Alameda County Office of Education
American Heart Association

Asian American for Housing and Environmental Justice (AA4HEJ)
Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement (APIFM)
Bay Area Ranchers' Cooperative Inc.
California Alternative Payment Program Association (CAPPA)
California Association for Health Physical Education Recreation & Dance
California Association of Food Banks
California Association of Student Councils
California Certified Organic Farmers
California School Nurses Organization
California School-Based Health Alliance
California Teachers Association
CaliforniaHealth+ Advocates
Californians for Pesticide Reform
Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County
Center for Ecoliteracy
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Ceres Community Project
Childrens Advocacy Institute
Common Sense
Community Action Partnership of Orange County
Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County
Community Health Improvement Partners
Dolores Huerta Foundation
Eat REAL (United States Healthful Food Council, Inc.)
Ecology Center, Berkeley
Food Research and Action Center
FoodCorps
Fresh Approach
Fresno Barrios Unidos
Friends of the Earth
Hidden Harvest
Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District
Mt. Diablo Unified School District
Napa's Operative for School food Health (NOSH)
Natural Resources Defense Council
NextGen California
No Kid Hungry
Oakland Unified School District
Office of Kat Taylor
Open Heart Kitchen
River City Food Bank
San Diego Food Bank
San Jose Bridge Communities
San Luis Coastal Unified School District
Second Harvest of the Greater Valley
SEIU California
Stemple Creek Ranch
Street Level Health Project
The Edible Schoolyard Project
TomKat Ranch
Union of Concerned Scientists

Western Center on Law and Poverty
Westside Food Bank

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